Georg Wiessala

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Georg Wiessala's *European Studies in Asia: Contours of a Discipline* examines the exchange of knowledge between Europe and Asia from the perspective of two disciplines, history and education. As such, the book is divided in three parts: Theoretical Aspects and Historical Predecessors (part one); The Contemporary Representations and Actors (part two); Teaching Europe in Asia: Case Studies (part three). The Central Asian exchange networks of goods and ideas, the Portuguese maritime empire and Jesuit missionary enterprise, and finally the network between pre-modern Siam, Japan, and Europe are the three historical contexts Wiessala examines as precursors of European studies in Asia. Wiessala does not merely focus on material goods, but in each period and region he emphasizes the role of religious actors in establishing a meeting and dialogue between the cultures and people of Europe and Asia. The efforts of Buddhist monks or Jesuit priests in educating the people they met also allows Wiessala to analyze their "analytical tools and frameworks" (6), the ways of how they disseminated and translated knowledge from Europe to Asia and vice versa, and how these historical examples can inform the present-day "theories of international relations" (6). This review will pay special attention to Wiessala's historical precedents, and more specifically his study of "the role of 'faith-based' exchange, religious enquiry and inter-faith cooperation as key drivers informing all manner of knowledge transfer" (6).

Wiessala starts his analysis of "historical predecessors" with the Silk Road, immediately recognizing that recent scholarship has emphasized that it was not simply one road or that silk was its main trading item. Relying on authoritative and recent scholarship, he carefully reconstructs the importance of this network of exchange of knowledge back to Roman and Han times. In this sweeping overview of the connections between both ends of the Eurasian continent, he correctly acknowledges the boost of the *pax Mongolica* to this trading network, though he may want to change the name of Tamerlane with Chinggis Khan (20). The Mongol successors of Chinggis Khan established and maintained the *pax Mongolica*, a safety that was no longer as ubiquitous or guaranteed by the time of Tamerlane's rule (1370–1405). Wiessala is correct in emphasizing that after the overland trade network experienced this brief stretch of violence during the fifteenth century, the upcoming European maritime trade networks by no means destroyed the overland trade connections. The Silk Roads network had always incorporated both overland and maritime routes and this continued to be the case until the eighteenth century. The

travels of Jesuits, Wiessala's second example of a historical predecessor and actors who embodied faith-based exchange, are a testament of this. Travelers such as Philippe Avril, Johann Grüber, Albert d'Orville, Jacques Le Faure are among the Jesuits who used both overland and maritime routes to connect Europe and Asia. In this first chapter Wiessala emphasizes the religious aspects of the transfer of knowledge between East and West, zooming in on the role of Buddhism. He seeks to bring together "spaces" and "sites" of learning with this inter-religious exchange, which represents a "model of an early, globalized, 'information super-highway'" (23). Wiessala recognizes the role of Islam along this network briefly, but, if time and space would have permitted it, a recognition of specific Muslim travelers alongside European actors may have added to the coherence of the historical overview that starts quite early and it would have acknowledged the continuous importance from the late Tang dynasty onwards to the early modern period of another religion's contributions to the exchange of knowledge across Eurasia. The commercial and religiously inspired voyages of Ibn Battuta fit rather well with those of "Asian itinerant Buddhist monks and European Christian missionaries" (31), and it could provide valuable context to Wiessala's careful discussion of the more destructive role of Islam later on and the stereotype that Muslim armies had ruined the Silk Road since the time of Nalanda. As a case-study to prove the importance of locality or sites of learning, Wiessala analyzes the legacy of the Nalanda University and how it operated as a center of knowledge. Wiessala argues that this "Oxford of Buddhist India" was "an early catalyst for the evolution of the Asia-Europe intellectual exchange in our day" (35). Most recently, various Asian nations have committed to rebuilding this institution on its ancient site, and as such Wiessala could not have picked a better example to bring the Silk Road's relevance and stimulation of ideas and learning into the twenty-first century.

From a focus on the Buddhist engagement and itinerants embodied by the Nalanda center of learning Wiessala then turns to a religious traveler who came from the opposite end of Eurasia: Jesuit missionaries and their activities and impact in China, India, and Japan. Wiessala singles out Portuguese Jesuits, which may seem like an odd choice since the core lesson of this historical example is the Jesuit approach of accommodation. He acknowledges that many renowned Jesuits were not Portuguese, but, if one concentrates on cultural exchange, it is also significant that, compared to their non-Portuguese fellow missionaries, Jesuit scholars have drawn attention to the fact that the Portuguese Jesuits were not as prolific in producing books or other cultural artifacts bridging Asia and Europe as their non-Portuguese brethren. The Jesuit "pioneering teaching technique" (41), what Wiessala calls the "going native" or

accommodation approach, started a cultural exchange between the East and the Lusitanian empire, even though Portuguese Jesuits did not suggest and were initially hesitant to endorse this approach in India or China. Wiessala does recognize that Italian Jesuits working under the Portuguese umbrella did. However, without the Portuguese form of colonialism and the Portuguese *padroado*, no Jesuits, Italian or Portuguese, would have been able to reach Asia. Furthermore, while later European states transported Jesuits such as the French, Wiessala argues that “the Portuguese colonial model of crown-monopoly and [...] capitalism provided important templates” for all Europeans.

Wiessala's final historical example explores the Dutch studies in Japan and the interactions between Siam and European merchants and missionaries. Wiessala credits Japanese artists and thinkers such as Shība Kōkan, for being inspiring educators “able to explain what must have seemed to most of his audience a very alien culture” (79). All these encounters can illustrate to modern teachers “the importance of diplomacy and ‘people-to-people’, or the respect for cultures, faiths and identities” (91).

After these three examples Wiessala's work makes contributions to the field of education. For specialists, *European Studies in Asia* is a too truncated summary of secondary literature that, while comparative in its approach, never quite examines the depth of the historical topic at hand. For educators, Wiessala's work is a much more valuable resource that provides them with concrete examples based on the author's life-long experience as an educator in Europe and Asia and with a densely annotated summary of the long-standing history of people bridging cultures at both ends of the Eurasian continent.

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